DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 198 233 UD 021 233

AUTHOR Loo, Chalsa
TITLE Chinatown: Recording Reality: Dispelling Myths.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Mental Health (DHEW), Rockville, Md. Center for Studies of Metropolitan Problems.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 22p.: Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (Montreal, Canada, September 1, 1980): the Conference for Chinese American Studies (San Francisco, CA, October 9, 1980): and the Asian American Pacific Islanders Conference (Seattle, WA, November 9, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attitudes: *Chinese Americans: *Community Satisfaction: Educational Opportunities: Employment Opportunities: Employment Problems: *Health: Mental Health: Physical Environment: Physical Health: *Quality of Life: Social Environment: Surveys: *Urban Environment
IDENTIFIERS *California (San Francisco)

ABSTRACT

This paper reports the results of an interview survey of 108 Chinese American residents of San Francisco, California's Chinatown. Subjects' attitudes were examined in six areas: quality of life, environment, physical health, mental health, psychological attitudes, and employment. Chinatown residents were found to be two to three times more dissatisfied with the quality of their lives than are Americans in general. Ninety percent of those Chinese surveyed reported that crowding has harmful effects on them and nearly half want to leave Chinatown. In terms of physical health, 82 percent indicated that they had seen a doctor in the past year. In addition, most Chinese reported that they still prefer Chinese doctors to Caucasian doctors. Regarding their mental health, 57 percent of those surveyed reported feeling depressed at least some of the time, though 74 percent were uninformed about existing mental health services. Nearly all respondents believed that Chinese must perform better than whites to get ahead. Regarding employment, low occupational pride and prestige characterized many of the jobs held by Chinatown residents. Language was indicated as a major barrier to better jobs by nearly all workers. (Author/APM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

FEB 2 1981

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Chinatown:

Recording Reality; Dispelling Myths[1]

Chalsa Loo

Chinatown Housing and Health Research Project

University of California, Santa Cruz

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
CHALSA LOO

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED198233

No study of Chinese Americans is complete without a study of San Francisco's Chinatown. To the tourist, Chinatown is an intriguing community of flattened ducks hanging in storefront windows, dim sum pastries and foods of unmanageable choices, curios that are vestiges of one of the world's oldest cultures, and discordant sounds of saxophones and Chinese musical instruments. Yet this community, so fascinating to tourists, is in reality a slum, a ghetto of poverty and overcrowding. At the same time, Chinatown is a unique community of historic significance. It represents the oldest Chinatown in the United States. It was the first gathering place of the earliest Chinese pioneers who left China for "Gum San" or Gold Mountain as California was called. This stalwart community of 132 years survived the forces of drastic change and destruction. Though one of the oldest ethnic ghettos, Chinatown is a constant infusion of the new. The stable force of the "long-time Californ's" live among a constantly revolving stream of immigrants and refugees — many entering as quickly as others depart — all in search of a better life. This community embodies a people who have long been victims of exclusionary immigration and discriminatory laws. Long neglected due to racial hostility, this community now struggles to meet its intense needs in the areas of housing, health, mental health, employment, and social and political equality. It is in this context that there has been a growing need to

CG021233

[1]This paper was presented at the American Psychological Association Convention in Montreal, Sept. 1, 1980 with Connie Young Yu, at the 1980 Conference for Chinese American Studies in San Francisco, Oct. 9, 1980, and at the Asian American Pacific Islanders Conference in Seattle, Nov. 9, 1980. This research was funded by a grant from : Center for the Study of Metropolitan Problems of the National Institute of M l Health.

study the opinions of Chinatown's residents.

Yet no study of Chinese Americans is meaningful unless it conveys reality and dispels myths. In this country there is no lack of beliefs or stereotypes about Chinese Americans or Chinatown. About their environment, outsiders have said, "The Chinese love Chinatown; give them a choice and they'd still live and work there." Outsiders have also said, "The Chinese thrive on crowding and noise." About services, we have heard, "The Chinese take care of their own. They have no need for social or government services." About mental health, people say, "Chinese have no mental health problems because of their close family ties." About health, many think of the Chinese as users of weird and exotic forms of medical treatment. Or they think of Chinese as sickly since they live in such unsanitary conditions. About quality of life many have said, "The Chinese are a model minority; unlike other minorities, they have succeeded." About personality, Chinese have been thought of as passive and accepting. And lastly, about research, many thought, "A survey in Chinatown? It can never be done; Chinese will never open their doors to a stranger, let alone confide about personal matters."

In this first interview survey of a representative sample of Chinese Americans in Chinatown, the first comprehensive survey of Chinese Americans conducted, we studied the opinions of Chinatown residents and examined the validity of these beliefs. And, as our presentation of the findings will show, we found these beliefs to be myths. Myths and stereotypes have always clouded the perceptions of outsiders, distorting the reality of a community and of a people. Distortion is harmful to outsiders who are denied true understanding and is particularly harmful to the residents who live, work, and struggle there.

In 1979, 108 Chinese Americans, ages 18 years and over who reside in San Francisco's Chinatown, were interviewed. Lasting an average of 3 hours, the interview spanned topics of immigrant experience, life satisfaction, housing and the environment, crowding, health, mental health, employment, and psychological attitudes. Both sexes were equally represented in the sample; eighty-one percent were foreign-born and 19% were American-born. Close to three-quarters of the interviews were conducted in Chinese, the other quarter in English. A majority (61%) of the sample was 45 years of age or over. Fifty-eight percent were married, 21% were unmarried, 15% widowed, and 6% divorced. The majority of our sample was selected by Area Sampling techniques, but the Polk City Directory and the Address Telephone Directory were also used for sampling selection. The sample was taken from both the Core and Non-Core Areas of Chinatown, but more heavily represented the Core Area which has a larger proportion of Chinese. Greater detail on the sampling procedures is found in Appendix I. Our response rate was 77%, disproving the belief that a survey in Chinatown is impossible.

This introduction highlights the major findings of the Chinatown survey. Covering the topics of life satisfaction, the environment, health, mental health, psychological attitudes,and employment, this introduction provides an overview of subsequent chapters which address each topic in fuller detail.

Life's Emptiness; Life's Satisfactions:

Quality of Life

Satisfaction With Life as a Whole

Two cars in every garage and leisure time may be the ingredients of happiness for the majority of white middle-class America, but in Chinatown, where less than 10% of the residents have a garage, only one-third have a car, and one-third work more less than a five-day week, level of life satisfaction may be quite different from middle America. One of the aims of our study was to determine the subjective descriptions of quality of life and the level of life satisfaction on various life domains for Chinatown residents.

The major finding regarding satisfaction with life as a whole was this: Chinatown residents are less satisfied with their lives than are Americans in general for nearly every dimension studied. Compared to the nation as a whole,[2] Chinatown residents are two to three times more dissatisfied when it comes to defining their life as boring, miserable, empty, disappointing, discouraging, or lacking opportunities.

While as much as half of the nation speak enthusiastically about their life, with such terms as "very interesting," "very enjoyable," "very full," "very rewarding," or "very hopeful," less than 8% of Chinatown residents describe their life in such positive terms. Chinatown residents see their lives in more negative terms than do Americans as a whole.

---

[2]Data from Andrews and Withey's (1976) national survey in 1973 and from Campbell, Converse and Rodgers (1976) national survey of 1971 were used as national comparisons. We recognize that we are not comparing comparable years, but national life satisfaction norms have not been found to change much over time (Andrews, personal communication).

Comparing life five years ago to life now, life satisfaction has shown a slight improvement for both Chinatown's Chinese and the national sample. Differences exist, though, for life satisfaction five years ago and prospects for the future. People in the nation as a whole felt much better about their lives five years ago than did Chinatown's residents. On Cantril's (1965) ladder of life satisfaction where 9 is the highest and 1 is the lowest on the scale, the mean level of satisfaction for the nation was 7.1 while for Chinatown it was 4.8. As to prospects for the future, Chinatown residents, like those in the national sample, expect a better life five years from now. The horizons of their expectations, though, fall short of the national sample. While 72% of the nation expect their life to occupy the top three rungs of the ladder of life satisfaction, five years hence, only 30% of Chinatown's residents dare hope for such a good life. While a mere 4% of the nation expect their life to trail among the three lowest rungs of life, twice as many Chinese project their life to be this bad.

Satisfaction with Particular Life Domains

Using a 7-point satisfaction scale, we measured level of satisfaction for 15 domains of life. Aspects of life from which Chinatown residents derive the greatest satisfaction are the way they get along with others and how their children turn out. Ninety-five percent are satisfied with how well they get along with others; 94% of those with children feel satisfied about how their children have turned out.

While sources of satisfaction lay with others, the two greatest sources of dissatisfaction center on the self. Chinatown residents show the greatest dissatisfaction with the amount of education they attained, with nearly half

(49%) wishing they could have achieved a higher level of education. Although 24% of our respondents have a college degree or better, nearly half (48%) of our respondents had a grade level education or less. According to interviewer observations, 8% of our sample was illiterate.

The source of the second greatest dissatisfaction lay with life accomplishments, with one-third expressing dissatisfaction. For many Chinese in this community, the emphasis on children's accomplishments serves as a replacement for disappointments in their own life.

Two other areas of dissatisfaction are worth noting. Twenty-nine percent were dissatisfied with the living conditions in Chinatown and 27% were dissatisfied with the amount of money they earn. The largest percentage of our sample[3] (57%) made an annual personal income in 1978 of less than $5,000, and 80% made less than $10,000. The median family income of Chinatown families in 1978 was between $8,000 and $8,999, which was lower than the average for white or for black families in that same year ($12,570 and $10,880 respectively).

The findings on quality of life in Chinatown tells us this. Those who think that the Chinese in America are successful are seeing the "gild" while blinded to the ghetto. Chinatown residents are not, in general, a part of the Asian American "success story." Quality of life in Chinatown is objectively and subjectively inferior to mainstream America on many dimensions. The belief that Chinese are happy in their community is a myth.

---

[3]This includes working and non-working respondents. Of the full-time employed respondents, 43% made less than $5,000 and 57% made less than $10,000.

Bitter Homes and Garbage

The Environment

Chinatown residents are no different from other people in America when it comes to what they want in housing. According to our survey, they want to live in a quiet, clean, and uncrowded neighborhood. But they never had this in the past, and they still do not have this today. In the early days of Chinatown, residents had to endure overcrowding and substandard housing because they were not allowed to live outside of Chinatown. Their dwellings were lodging houses, suitable for a bachelor society, not for families. Although public housing facilities were created after World War II, waiting lists for as long as five years hence reveal the tremendous housing need in this community.

Today, only 13% of Chinatown's residents are homeowners; the vast majority of them are forced to rent. Crowding, dirt, crime, and noise were the most disliked qualities of their neighborhood, and crowding took first place. A full 90% report that crowding has harmful effects on them personally. These findings dispel the belief that Chinese like crowding and that they live in crowded conditions without ill effect.

Only half of Chinatown's residents are living in a well-kept-up building. Traffic noise and neighborhood noises bother more than half of them. Three out of every ten say their heating is "not too good," or "not good at all." Seven out of every ten have to battle with cockroaches, mice, or rats in their dwelling. And remediation is not close at hand, for 87% of the residents do not know of any agency that could help them solve housing or pest problems. Furthermore, Chinatown was thought to be undesirable for teenagers and chil-

dren. Air pollution, dirt, noise, and inadequate recreational facilities were named unhealthy elements for children and some fear the harmful influence of gangs.

Chinatown residents are hardly living the American dream. Judging from these findings, a home in Chinatown better qualifies for "Bitter Homes and Garbage" than for "Better Homes and Gardens."

While many aspects of Chinatown's environment are disliked by her residents, many of them tolerate it[4] because they have no choice, or because their satisfaction with the community offsets problems they have with their housing. Basically, the community offers their residents convenience for shopping, transportation, restaurants, food, and work. These advantages make it a good place for the elderly to live, say the respondents most of whom are middle-aged or older. The desire to live among a lot of Chinese, expressed by 78% of the residents, is also satisfied here. Living among persons who speak the same language is critical when almost half (43%) cannot speak English, and of those who can, one-third assess their ability as "rather poor." "I can't speak English so I have to stay in Chinatown all the time," said one respondent. Lastly, satisfaction is related to perceptions of choice, and a majority (55%) of the residents feel they have "little or no choice" in their housing. Without choice, one accommodates to what is available and feels somewhat satisfied; those who feel this way are the middle-aged and elderly immigrants who have little income, who have lived in Chinatown a long time and who have

---

[4]On a scale of "unsatisfactory," "best I can find but not ideal," "tolerable," "close to ideal," and "ideal," 40% say their dwelling is "ideal" or "close to ideal," and 60% say it is "unsatisfactory," "best I can find," or "tolerable." On a 4-point scale, 75% say they are satisfied with their dwelling, 25% say they are dissatisfied.

not been exposed to lifestyles different from their own.

But there are those who are not satisfied, who are not resigned to accepting what they have; these 42% want to move out of Chinatown. They represent the young, the American-born, those with better incomes, and those exposed to lifestyles different from Chinatown's -- they are the ones who want to leave. These findings dispel the belief that if given a choice, the Chinese would remain in Chinatown. The high proportion of immigrants in Chinatown (81%) found in our study, representing an increase of 38% from 1970,[5] supports our prediction that this community will increasingly be composed of the old, the poor, and the immigrant.

Pulse on Chinatown:

Physical Health

Chinatown has always been maligned as the most unsanitary and unhealthy section in San Francisco. In terms of health care and medical care however, remarkable change has taken place, as revealed by our survey findings. In the thirties, the Chinese thought that going to the hospital meant death for the patient. Medical care was provided by herbalists. Western-trained doctors had to compete with the Chinese herbalists and acupuncturists. Today, our survey findings reveal that Chinatown residents are no longer hesitant to see a doctor. In general, the resistance to seeking medical care is a historical phenomena of the past. A full 82% of our respondents say they saw a doctor in the past year, and the remainder say they would, if they had an illness that

---

[5]The 1970 census found that 43% of Chinatown's population were foreign-born.

needed treatment. Several factors have helped erode resistance to seeking the help of a physician. The embargo of imports from China during World War II and the following decades depleted supplies of herbs and made total reliance on Chinese medicine impossible. Medicare and Medi-Cal made health care available to those Chinese who normally could not afford it. Furthermore, community outreach programs and health workers have made the residents more aware of Western medicine.

Today, Chinatown residents are eclectic in their health care treatment; they want both Chinese and Western medicine available to them, even though they are more likely to see a doctor for an illness than an acupuncturist or herbalist. Acupuncture and herb use is less than might be imagined in this Chinese community but is still used. In the past year 29% of the residents had seen a Chinese herbalist; of those who had not, roughly half (49%) say they would if they had an illness that needed treatment. In the past year, only 10% had seen an acupuncturist; of those who had not, a third say they would if they had an illness that needed treatment. Summarily then, up to 50% of Chinatown's residents did or would see an herbalist and 44% did or would see an acupunturist.

Chinatown residents rely on Chinese home remedies like ointments, herb teas, or soups, more than they seek formal treatment from an herbalist or acupuncturist. When ill, seven out of ten residents use Chinese home remedies of ointments and herb teas and nine out of ten drink Chinese herb soups. We suspect that Chinese medicines are taken along with Western medicine or are taken in cases where Western medicine has no cure or is a less effective cure. Today, in Chinatown, physicians and health workers recognize and allow for a combined Chinese and Western treatment approach; past competition between

these methods does not seem to now exist.

Our survey also found that although there is little or no resistance to seeing a doctor, there is still a preference for seeing a Chinese physician over a White physician. In the past year, 63% went to a doctor of their own race, 17% went to both Chinese and White doctors, and 21% saw a White doctor.

The percentage of residents who saw a doctor in the past year is higher than the national average of 75%. Yet the findings do not reveal a physically unhealthy community. Three-fourths of Chinatown's residents say they are satisfied with their health. Also 43% say their health was "excellent" or "good," 42% say their health was "fair," and only 15% say their health was "poor." Only 8% say they get sick more often than others their own age; the remainder said they get sick "just as often" (53%) or "less often" (36%). We interpret these subjective reports to reflect a fairly good bill of health as defined by the residents, especially considering the fact that there is a high proportion of elderly in this community. In summary, while in the other domains of life, conditions in Chinatown have seen little improvement; in the area of physical health, there has been dramatic improvement.

Emotional Stress and Mental Health

The belief that "Chinese take care of their own" is a common fallacy which assumes that the Chinese American family does not need outside help. According to his belief, many argue that the Chinese are without mental problems or, if they have them that the family prevents or takes care of them.

Low utilization of family health services by Chinese Americans is similarly pointed to as evidence of a low prevalence of mental illness among the

Chinese. Many Asian Americans argue that the underutilization of services does not reflect a low mental illness rate, rather it reflects the fact that existing services are insensitive to the needs of Chinese Americans. Bilingual staff in sufficient numbers is lacking and Western forms of psychotherapy are inappropriate. This explains why many Chinatown residents do not seek psychiatric help until the condition is severe or irrevocable. The high rate of suicide in Chinatown, highest of any district in the city, is dramatic proof of this problem.

Much of the information that we have on the mental health status of Chinese is based on mental hospital admission rates or on college populations. Data on these restricted populations shed little light on the mental health problems of a general population of Chinese Americans. The Chinatown survey sought to address this need.

Many researchers believe that psychosomatic illness holds the key to uncovering the mental health status of the Chinese because of a tradition that does not separate physical from mental health or because of resistance to admitting emotional problems for fear of social stigma. In Chinatown we found an extremely high prevalence of psycho-physiological disorders. The incidence rate on the Langner scale was comparable to that found in the classic Midtown Manhattan survey (Srole, Langner, Michael, Opler, and Rennie, 1962), a survey which shocked the nation by its finding of extensive mental health problems. Roughly one-third of the Chinatown residents have psycho-physiological problems and one-fourth have extensive problems of this nature, defined as having four-or-more and six-or-more symptoms of the 22 respectively. In summary, if one is looking for clues to the mental health status of Chinese Americans, data on psychosomatic functioning clearly provides this.

Findings directly related to mental health status confirm that, in fact, physiological and emotional stresses are prevalent in Chinatown. A full 57%, over half of Chinatown's residents, say they feel depressed "many times" or "sometimes." This high rate of reported depression runs counter to the notion that Chinese Americans resist admitting to emotional problems. In addition, close to half (48%) have trouble concentrating which may be due to environmental stresses of crowding and noise or internal stresses of tension and anxiety. In fact, from 30-45% of Chinatown's residents feel hassled and emotionally agitated: people annoy or irritate them, many things upset them at work or at home, and many things make them angry. This temperment of irritability often pervades the tone of Chinatown. Chinatown has not the atmosphere of a typical residential area. In Chinatown, life is a perpetual hassle.

Personal problems are most commonly expressed through sleepless nights, depressed moods, anger, and irritability. The most common forms of coping with emotional problems include thinking out the problem on one's own, distractions from the problem or seeking advice from others. About six out of ten of the residents have sought help or advice from others for personal problems; this suggests that Chinese Americans do not "suffer in silence" as some have believed. The person most often seen for advice on a personal problem was one's spouse; 68% of the married respondents talked to their spouse about their problem. This was followed in prevalence by seeking advice from a friend (55% spoke to a friend about a personal problem), then by other family members or relatives.

Despite the fact that most residents say they have a friend or relative they could talk to about their problems, these people apparently do not fulfill important emotional needs. Two-thirds of the people interviewed wish

there was someone they could really talk to, and two-thirds wish they had more friends. Mental health professionals are not popularly sought despite this need; only 5% of the residents had gone to a mental health center or seen a mental health professional. This underutilization of mental health services in Chinatown is probably partly due to the fact that a high 74% of the residents are uninformed about any mental health center that counsels people with problems. The underutilization of services does not reflect a low mental illness rate, as found in our findings.

In summary, the results of our study show that Chinatown residents are neither defensive nor fearful about revealing their stress and depression. They do not try to present a stoic image of being problem-free as some might have guessed. "Saving face" is not so great an obstacle to the collection of mental health data as some might fear. And most importantly, emotional stress and psycho-physiological problem rates are extremely high in Chinatown, contrary to many beliefs.

Psychological Attitudes

No other race in the history of California were victims of such various and intricate discriminatory laws as were the Chinese. While California needed Chinese labor, it devised means to insure that the Chinese would be denied equal rights. To name just a few of these laws and actions -- an 1854 ruling forbid the Chinese to testify in court, depriving them of any protection under the law; an 1859 decision prevented Chinese from attending public schools; discriminatory taxes sought to drive the Chinese out of the mines and out of nearly all businesses; immigration exclusion and restrictions preventing citizenship were aimed solely at the Chinese race; and an anti-Chinese

state holiday encouraged unchecked violence against the Chinese. The history of the Chinese in America has been one of trauma and we sought to understand what effects this trauma has had on the attitudes of today's Chinatown residents.

The survey found that one-half of Chinatown residents feel that Chinese Americans are treated worse than Whites. And nearly all (a full 90%) believe that Chinese in America must perform better than Whites in order to get ahead. Chinatown s residents feel they and other Chinese Americans are less advantaged and thus must outdo and outwork Whites in order to achieve any of society's rewards. Being "as good as" is not enough. The burden of coping with discrimination is a tough one, for the most common method of coping with discrimination had to do with efforts of the individual Chinese American rather than with collective efforts. Comments that the Chinese should work hard, perform better, prove Whites wrong and strive for higher education convey the enormous stress that the Chinese place on achievement, hard work, and persistence in coping with anti-Chinese discrimination. Assertiveness, collective action, and unity were the next most frequently mentioned approaches for dealing with discrimination. For at least a third of the residents, racism aimed at them personally instills a motivation to alter such unfair treatment. All told, there was tremendous diversity of opinion concerning ways of coping with discrimination

In terms of trust, the survey found that half of the Chinatown population feel cautious and distrustful of others. Fears of their forebearers, grounded in reality, remain today. Moreover, Chinatown residents distrusts Whites and other Chinese equally. Past discriminatory practices and fears account for the distrust felt by Chinese in this community towards Whites. And seeing

Chinese compete with other Chinese in their struggle for survival amidst scarce resources accounts for the distrust of fellow Chinese.

Findings regarding Individual-System blame (Gurin, Gurin, Lao and Beattie, 1969) reveal that attribution of blame for problems facing Chinese Americans is spread between the American system and the Chinese American, with slightly more blame placed upon the Chinese. Roughly 50% to 65% blame members of their own race for not adapting to White American customs, not having the needed skill, and not adequately preparing themselves. At the same time, roughly 35% to 55% blame the American system for favoring Whites, discriminating against Chinese and affording fewer opportunities to Chinese compared to Whites.

In this study, the concept behind the internal-external locus of control scale, as originally conceived by Rotter, proved culturally inappropriate for Chinatown residents. When items on the belief in work were separated from the belief in luck or fate, we found that for Chinatown residents there was no correlation between the belief in the work ethic and the belief in luck and fate; these two beliefs are largely independent attitudes for Chinese Americans. We found that nearly all of the residents (78% - 98%) believe in the work ethic as a determinant of success, and between 40% to 60% believe in luck and fate as determinants of life events. Thus, while the large majority of Chinatown residents believe that endurance and hard work will bring life rewards, many believe in the dual forces of individual effort plus luck or fate.

Some believe you should do the best you can, living the best life possible under the circumstances; and should an unwanted event occur, interpret it

as misfortune, not as personal failure. Blame rests with fate, not with the individual, and fate must be accepted. While this attitude helps many cope, it does not ward off depression and despair when hardships become unbearable and support is lacking, which is apparant from the high mental health problems evidenced.

Personal efficacy refers to the degree of control one has over events in one's life. There is an important distinction for Chinese Americans in terms of personal efficacy between what they believe should be done and what they believe actually happens to them. Seventy-two percent said that, "it's better to plan your life a good ways ahead;" but 79% said that "when I do make plans ahead, things usually come up to make me change my plans." While Chinatown's people strive to have control over their lives, obstacles continually intrude on their plans.

Lastly, a scale of items to measure ways of coping with negative outcomes was developed for this study. Rather than revealing Chinatown residents as passive and accommodating in personality or as assertive in personality, results showed that no generalizations can be made about Chinese Americans in terms of passive or assertive personality. There were, however, differences as a function of origin and situation. As to origin, immigrants tend to be more accommodating while American-born tend to be more assertive. As to situation, the majority are determined to assert themselves when the origin of a problem is clear and available and when the "chips are down." But denial or nonassertiveness are more prevalent responses with respect to handling more unpleasant situations, reacting to events of minor importance, and challenging the status quo.

In summary, Chinatown residents feel disadvantaged in this society. Despite obstacles and the force of fate, the Chinese are not passive; they are strugglers, and the work ethic is a driving motivator for all.

A Job Is A Job Is Better Than No Job:
Employment in Chinatown

"Good wages in Gum San" read the handouts from the American clipper ships docked in Canton. But upon arrival, Chinese workers found themselves driven from one occupation to another until they were forced to take jobs nobody else wanted. They became laundrymen, cooks and houseboys. They worked in the fields and in dangerous construction work, and they built the Central Pacific Railroad.

"The Chinese Must Go" was a slogan of labor organizers and politicians which led to the Chinese Exclusion Law of 1882. The workers that remained found themselves excluded from labor unions and better jobs. The Chinese who were persecuted in the small towns and rural areas retreated to San Francisco's Chinatown.

World War II broke down many barriers for the Chinese. Chinese were able to get jobs in industries and began entering the professions in larger numbers, finding work outside of Chinatown. Yet in the following decades with the influx of a large number of immigrants from Hong Kong, the situation for many Chinatown workers reverted back to nineteenth century conditions. The Chinatown survey documents the prevalent job disappointments, difficulties, and limitations that now depict employment in Chinatown.

One of the major problems is the low occupational prestige and pride that characterize many of the jobs held by Chinatown workers. Although 16% are professional and technical workers at the high end of the prestige scale, the majority (59%) of Chinatown's workers are employed in the low prestige occupations of restaurant workers and seamstresses. A high 86% of Chinatown's workers say they would not want their children to be doing the same kind of work they do. This finding reveals the low regard the workers have for their occupations as well as the high aspirations they hold for their children. To a more direct question, more than half of Chinatown's workers (53%) say they do not feel proud of the kind of work they do.

This low job pride is coupled with high work competence and feelings of underemployment. Almost all (97%) of the workers feel their work performance is competent and a little over half feel underemployed. These are ingredients for the feeling held by half the workers that their job is neither actualizing nor meaningful; their job gives them no opportunity to use their abilities, develop their potential, nor acquire new skills. Under these conditions, a job is a job is a job. Disappointment becomes frustration when many of the jobs in Chinatown are taxing without the job compensations that most Americans take for granted (such as medical benefits, opportunities for raises or promotions, or a decent income). Roughly 30% to 40% of Chinatown's workers describe their work place as noisy; they work under constant time pressures, have to compete with others, and feel physically exhausted, bored, and emotionally stressed by work which is demanding yet demeaning. They work a longer work-week with more irregular hours than the "average American." The median family income for Chinatown residents, already low, represents an income primarily derived (for 73% of the respondents) from multiple wage-

earners in the family. Many (84%) of these say they could not or would barely get by if the family had but one wage earner.

Language is a major barrier to better jobs, according to nearly all (95%) of the workers. A full 82% say they would leave their present job if they could master the English language. But this is not easy since more than half (58%) of the Chinese work at all-Chinese or mostly-Chinese work places where English is rarely spoken. And when a third of the workers labor six or seven days a week, often 10 hours a day, new immigrants have little chance of learning English.

It may be surprising that despite the disappointments and difficulties, six out of every ten workers in Chinatown are satisfied with their job. There are reasons for this. Over half (54%) of the workers are employed at Chinese-owned businesses, where language and culture are familiar. Also the vast majority of workers have no fear about job security. Only 19% of the respondents consider job security a problem. Workers are often relatives of the boss or were referred by friends or relatives. The firing of workers in Chinese-owned businesses is rare. Lastly, many workers have lowered occupational expectations due to the language limitation. Job discontent is accepted because, unless they master the English language, they try to be satisfied with what they have. After all, job demand is high and "a job is a job is better than no job."

In summary, the fact that, were the language not a barrier, most workers would want to occupationally move out of Chinatown, proves wrong the belief that the Chinese would remain in their community. Most importantly the findings reveal that although the Chinese in America are believed to have "made

it," Chinatown is not a part of this success story.

Conclusion

In summary, having looked at all of the major areas of life for the residents of Chinatown, we see that this is not the Chinatown seen by the camera-holding tourist; it is the Chinatown as lived by its people and the picture is far from perfect.